

## Social Psychology.

Everybody has heard of peer pressure, but most people argue that they are not affected by it, or at least not affected as 'most people.' The truth is, we are all affected by the people we interact with, many of whom we don't even know personally. Our social environments play a significant role in how we view ourselves, and conversely, how we see ourselves impacts our view of the world.



# Defining social influence

- Social influence is the process by which attitudes, perceptions and behaviours can be influenced by the real or implied presence of others (Kassim et al 2002)
- Social influence may involve compliance where one publicly acts according to perceived norms while privately disagreeing with such norms

# Classic studies in social influence

**Solomon Asch (1951)**

(majority influence)

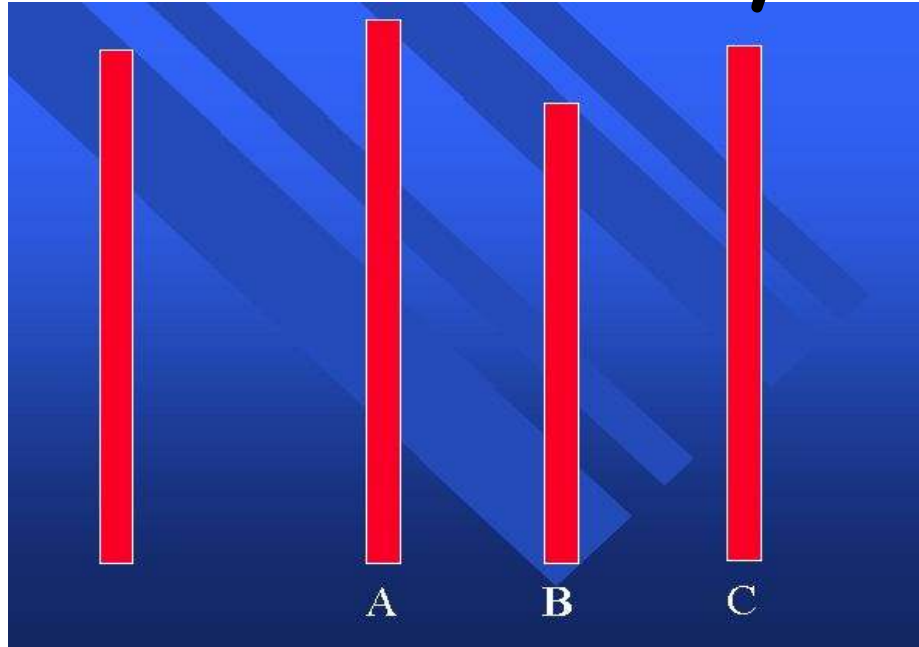
**Muzafer Sherif (1935)** Autokinetic  
paradigm/effect

(how groups form norms)

**Stanley Milgram (1963)** Obedience study

(Why people obey orders from authority)

# Asch & Conformity



## •Results:

- Overall, subjects conformed to wrong answer on 37% of target trials
- 75% of subjects conformed on at least one trial
- 50% of subjects conformed on more than half of the trials
- The group exerted *normative influence* by instilling a fear of appearing deviant
- Led to *public conformity* (surface behaviour change) in the subjects

**Some critics** thought the high levels of conformity found by Asch were a reflection of American, 1950's culture:

•'It was time-consuming and uneconomical'.  
(Crutchfield)

•'Tasks set not like real-life situations'.  
(Crutchfield)

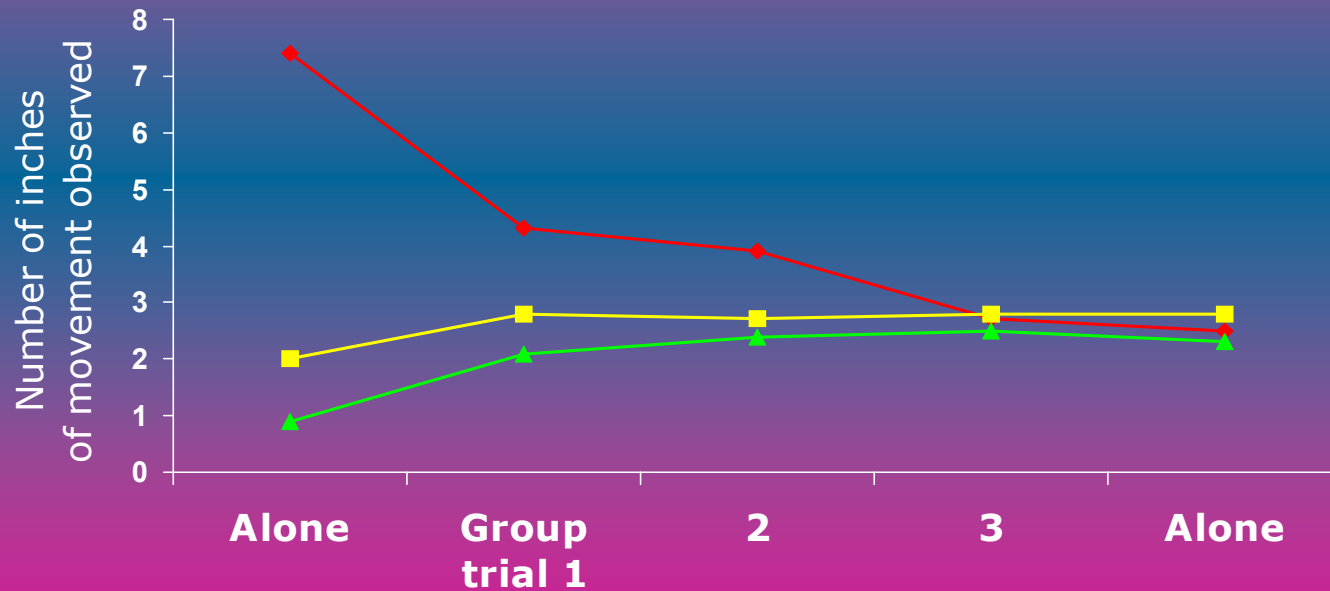
•'It did not account for minority'. influences

## Influences on Conformity

- **Group size:**
  - Conformity increases with group size up to four persons in the group, and then levels off
- **Awareness of group norms:**
  - Conformity increases when the norm is "activated" or brought to the person's attention
- **An ally in dissent:**
  - The presence of a single confederate who disagrees with the majority reduces conformity

# Sherif (1935) Autokinetic Effect

Forming normative perception (Myers 2002)



# Sherif' Experiment

- In an classic experiment Sherif (1935) showed participants a single pinpoint of light in a dark room
- Participants were asked to estimated individually how far the light moved from its original position
- After the initial individual attempt participants worked in pairs & then groups to try & reach consensus.
- Group consensus was reached by establishing an agreed point.

## Criticism of Sherif's work:

The 'group' used consisted of three people. They may not have considered themselves to be a group.

There was no right or wrong answer, it was an ambiguous task, and Sherif told them that he was going to move the light, so they were more likely to change their minds anyway.

# Why do people join groups

- Because people generally seek agreement about what they see & how to behave (normative behaviour)
- Normal people behave like other normal people
- People who are NOT normal tend to be rejected or isolated
- Most people are normal so we tend to mimic (copy) majority behaviour
- Normative behaviour enhances self-esteem because of approval from others

## Compliance

- **The norm of *reciprocity*:**
  - Treating others as they treat you
  - Feeling obligated to return a favour, or comply when you been given something
- **Request strategies:**
  - *Foot-in-the-door technique*:
    - Begin with a small request, secure agreement
    - Then make a separate larger request
  - *Door-in-the-face technique*:
    - Begin with a large request that will be rejected
    - Follow with a more modest-sounding request
  - *That's-not-all technique*:
    - Begin a somewhat inflated request
    - Immediately decrease the apparent size of the request by offering a discount or adding a bonus

# Factors that effect conformity

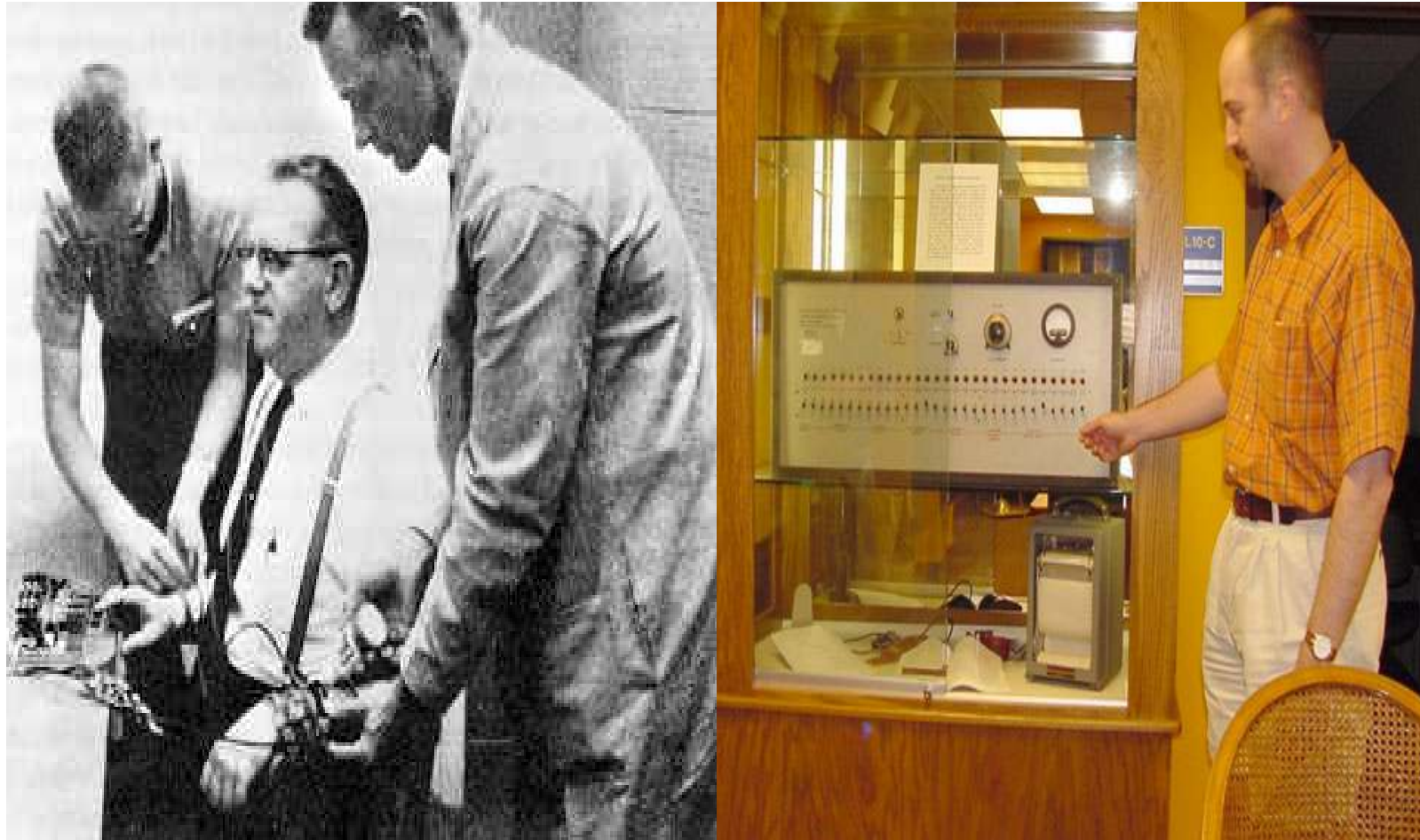
## Gender differences:

- In general, sex differences in conformity are weak and unreliable
  - What appears to matter is one's familiarity with the issue at hand, not one's gender
- Small sex differences do emerge in face-to-face encounters
  - Women conform more and men conform less when they think they are being observed
  - May result from pressure to behave in ways viewed as acceptable within traditional gender-role constraints

## Cultural orientations:

- *Individualism:*
  - emphasizes independence, autonomy, and self-reliance
- *Collectivism:*
  - emphasizes interdependence, cooperation, and social harmony
- Conformity rates are generally higher in collectivist cultures
- Three factors that determine social orientation in a society
  - *Complexity.*
  - *Affluence:*
  - *Heterogeneity.*
- The higher the level of these three factors in a society, the more likely it is to be individualistic

# Milgram's obedience experiment



## Milgram's Obedience Studies

- The basic procedure
  - A volunteer subject comes to the lab, meets the experimenter and another subject (a confederate)
  - Experimenter explains that this is a memory study, and assigns one subject (the real subject) to be a "teacher" and the other (confederate) to be the "learner"
  - The teacher watches the experimenter strap down and attach electrodes to the "learner"
- **The "teacher" is then taken to a separate booth and instructed to read a series of questions to the "learner"**
  - The teacher can hear the "learner," and see the "learner's" response to the questions on a lighted board
  - Each time the "learner" makes an error, the "teacher" depresses a switch on a "shock generator" to shock the learner
  - The shocks become more intense each time
  - The "learner" progressively complains about pain and asks to quit the study
  - The experimenter orders the "teacher" to continue
  - How far will the subjects obey?
  - No shocks are actually given, but the situation appears real to the subjects ("teachers")

- The original findings:
  - All subjects obeyed up to the 300 volt level (labelled extreme shock where the "learner" had been screaming in pain)
  - 65% obeyed all the way to the 450 volt level (labelled XXX well above the "Danger" level and by which time the "learner" has become silent)
  - Subjects visibly upset and nervous at the situation

### **Criticism of Milgram's work**

Milgram was fiercely criticised.

His results upset people - this may have been because they felt uncomfortable with what it showed about ordinary Americans. Maybe if they had not been so shocking (excuse the pun!) people would not have given Milgram's work a second thought, perhaps the unpalatable findings made people seek to discredit the procedures.

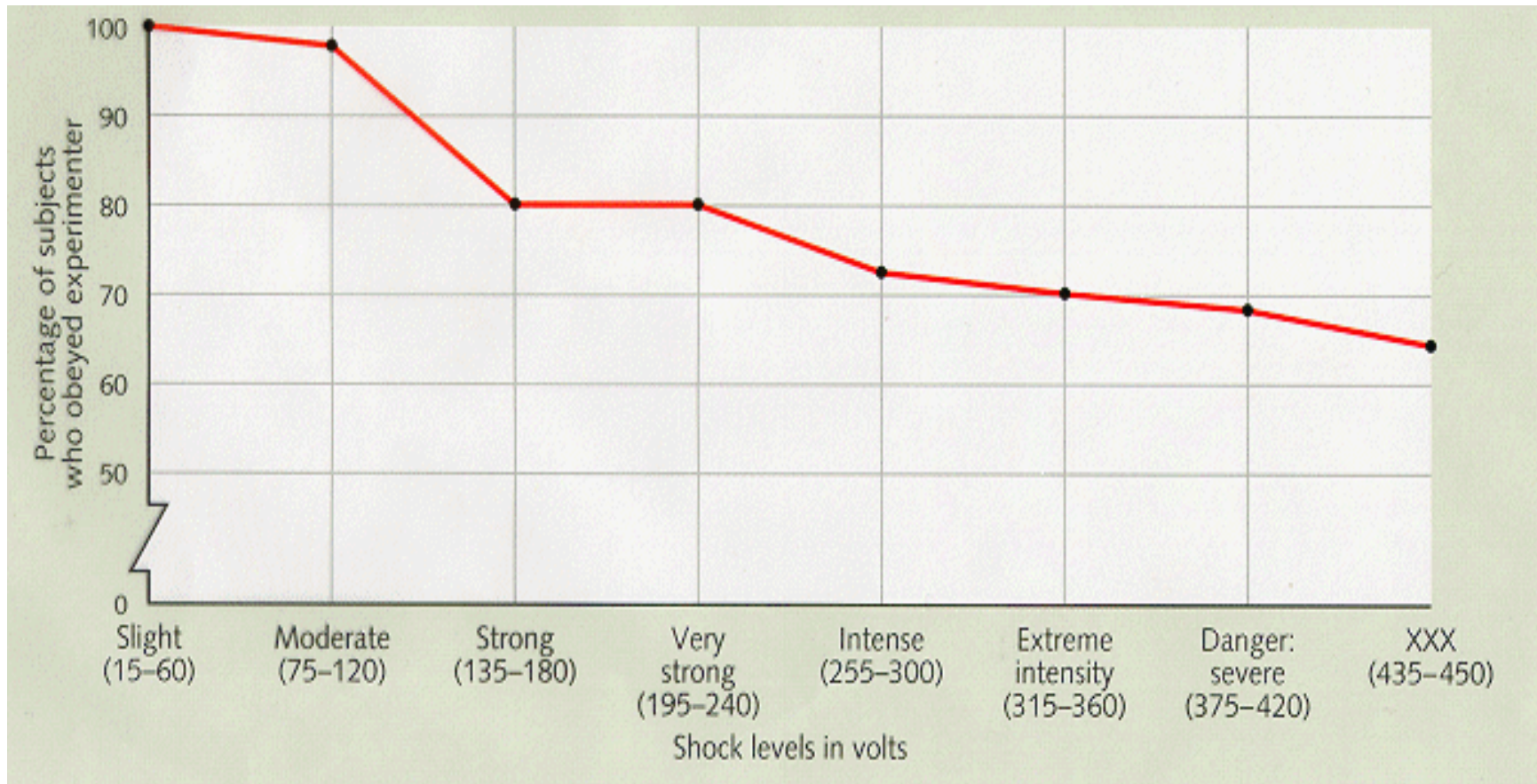
Milgram's work on obedience was attacked on ethical grounds, saying he deceived people and caused unreasonable distress. Volunteers often showed **extreme stress** - sweating, trembling, stammering, even having uncontrollable fits.

**The APA decided that Milgram's work was ethically acceptable.**

On practical grounds, people argued that demand characteristics created the high rates of obedience. It was a **highly artificial** setting and in a prestigious location, but even when Milgram moved the experiment to a downtown location, obedience rates were still alarmingly high.

However, Zimbardo defended Milgram and has said his work is "the most generalise in all of social science... dozens of systematic replications with a 1000 subjects from as diverse backgrounds as possible...."

# Milgram's findings



## Psychological factors that explain why we obey.

**Agentic theory:** When we act as the **agent** of someone in authority we find it easy to deny personal responsibility for our actions (lack autonomy) - just following orders or just doing our job.

**E.g.** Nazi soldiers in the war- One guard at his trial in Nuremberg famously quoted he was not to blame as he was doing as he was told therefore he should not be held accountable.

**The role of Buffers:** If you were asked to press the button to release weapons of mass destruction onto another country, this would be easier..as you would not have to see the consequences of your actions..the distance acts as a buffer. Asking you to pull the trigger of a gun may cause you more issues.